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SUBJECT: Thai Immigration Makes Arrests in Labor Trafficking Case

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¶1. (SBU) On May 17, the Thai Immigration Police (raided a small garland-making factory (located in a home) in Samut Sakhon, rescuing nineteen Laotian girls and young women, ages 12-20, who the police consider victims of human trafficking. The Immigration police arrested the two factory owners, Mr. Kasem Pensuk and Mrs. Tawanrat Sukprasertngam, on charges of human trafficking, child labor, and receiving/sheltering illegal immigrants. The Immigration Police and Ministry of Social Development and Human Securities (MSDHS) officials became aware of the case through another Laotian girl who had escaped the factory. All twenty victims, including the escapee, are being cared for at the Thai government's "Baan Kredtakarn" victim shelter.

¶2. (SBU) On May 20, MSDHS Minister, Issara Somchai, and the MSDHS Permanent Secretary, Mr. Wanlop Ploytubtim, visited victims in the Royal Thai Government (RTG) shelter. Speaking of the case, Permanent Secretary Wanlop assured a reporter that the Laotian girls will return home safely. Minister Issara used the opportunity to note for the media the existence of the 24-hour telephone hotline to report human trafficking (TIP) cases.

¶3. (SBU) MSDHS social workers with whom Econoffs have spoken stated that they had interviewed the case victims and are working with the Laotian government to prepare for their repatriation. Efforts are focusing on confirming each victim's citizenship, locating their respective homes, and ensuring that the homes are safe for the victims' return (there is concern that family members of victims could have been involved in the trafficking). MSDHS is also working with officials from the Ministry of Labor (MOL) to seek compensation for the victims for wages earned (that which they received is below the minimum wage required by Thai law). In order to pursue criminal charges for forcing children under 15 to work, MSDHS and police officials are working with a hospital to verify victims' ages.

¶4. (SBU) According to a social worker at the Baan Kredtakarn shelter, most of the victims (all Laotian) came from Savannaket province in Laos. One victim stated that brokers visited her home in Savannaket and promised work as a garland maker with a monthly income of 3,000 baht. According to victim statements, in April 2008, the victims paid labor brokers 4,500 baht per person to bring them into Thailand. Employers allegedly gave them two meals a day and promised a payment of 2,500-3,000 baht per month. Employers only gave victims a small amount (approximately 200 baht) of their promised wages, claiming to have sent much of the wages to the victims' parents in Laos. While a few girls were allowed out of the factory to sell garlands in the market, others were locked inside the house/factory for refusing to work for less money than they were promised. It is unclear whether any of the victims were physically abused.

Comment

15. (SBU) According to a local media report, the Thai Immigration Police conducted another anti-human trafficking operation on May 27 in the city of Ranong, arresting an individual who was planning on transporting illegal Burmese migrants to Phuket. It remains unclear whether this operation involved human trafficking or merely human smuggling (the Thai media often confuses the two). Regardless, we are encouraged that these two raids (in Samut Sakhon and Ranong) may indicate the Thai Immigration Police are playing an increasingly active and productive part in Thailand's counter-TIP efforts. The Thai government's extensive training of law enforcement officials on the 2008 TIP law, including within the Immigration police, had this goal in mind.